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Current Co-Sponsors: Suzanne Bonamici, Lois Capps, Howard Coble, Mike Coffman, Peter DeFazio, Charlie Dent, Keith Ellison, Richard Hanna, Gregg Harper, Bill Johnson, Walter Jones, David Joyce, Barbara Lee, Ben Ray Lujan, David McKinley, Patrick Meehan, Chellie Pingree, Kurt Schrader, Mike Simpson, Pat Tiberi, Niki Tsongas

Dear Colleague:

We invite you to join as a cosponsor of the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2013, HR 2504, a bill that will help ensure our seniors and disabled citizens have timely access to home health services under Medicare.

Nurse practitioners (NP), clinical nurse specialists (CNS), certified nurse midwives (CNM), and physician assistants (PA), play an increasingly important role in the delivery of primary health care services, particularly in rural and medically-underserved areas where access to a physician can be scarce. In 1997, Congress authorized Medicare coverage for the physician services provided by these professionals as long as they are within the scope of practice defined by state laws, such as physician supervision guidelines.

Despite this recognition of their role in the health workforce, these clinicians remain unable to order home health services for the Medicare patients under their care. Medicare recognizes state laws that allow these providers to provide care in home health settings, but requires a physician's signature to initiate or certify a home health episode, even if their state law would allow it.

The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2013 would ensure that our Medicare beneficiaries get the home health care they need in a timely manner by allowing NPs, CNSs, CNMs and PAs, to order home health services, if allowed under state law.

For many patients, these clinicians serve as their main source of care, especially in areas where a physician isn't always readily available. In such situations, this impediment merely amounts to an extra administrative and paperwork burden, and creates an unnecessary step that fails to recognize recent advances in training and scope-of-practice guidelines. As a result, patients in need of home health care services are either placed in more expensive health care settings, or experience a delay in receiving the care they need.

This bill also eases a burden with a new requirement that a doctor must perform a face-to-face visit before certifying a home health episode. Current law allows non-physician providers to substitute for the physician for the purposes of this face-to-face requirement, but does not allow them to sign the final care plan. The Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act would give these clinicians that flexibility.

This bill is supported by the National Association for Home Care and Hospice, the American Nurses Association, the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the American College of Nurse Midwives, and others.

For more information, or to sign on as a co-sponsor, please contact Charlene MacDonald in Rep. Schwartz's office (charlene.macdonald@mail.house.gov), or Danny Fernandez in Rep. Walden's office (danny.fernandez@mail.house.gov)

Best Regards,

Greg Walden

Member of Congress

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